



December 2016

# Monthly Report from the Director

**VA** | Ralph H. Johnson  
VA Medical Center



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Medical Center Director



**Christmas Holiday (Observed)**  
*Monday, December 26*  
Federal Holiday

As the year draws to a close, we reflect on the goals we have reached over the past 12 months – the goals we will continue to strive for in the coming years - and especially on the people who have touched our lives. While we have reached many goals, such as opening VA’s first National Tele-Mental Health Hub and continuing our tradition of providing excellent quality care as demonstrated by our VA SAIL ranking and external performance assessments, it is the people we serve who have made 2016 truly remarkable.

People like LT Clebe McClary,

USMC (ret.) who led PFC Ralph H. Johnson’s platoon in Vietnam and was injured in the blast that claimed Ralph’s life, or his platoon-mate Alex Colvin who remembers Ralph as a great friend who gave his all. They shared their memories of Ralph and that fateful night 48 years ago with us all during our recent symposium, “Heroes Among Us: The Ongoing 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War.” They were also joined by Air Force Flight Nurse Jackie Hall who evacuated wounded Soldiers for two years during the height of the war, and Army helicopter pilot Frank Walker whose valiance saved a group of Marines from certain death. [Click here](#) to watch the event, which was broadcast live by ABC News 4, and see their individual stories. I am certain you will be touched just as I was by both their heroism and humility as they – in their minds – only did what was necessary to serve their country.



ABC News 4 broadcasts, “Heroes Among Us: The Ongoing 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War”.

The very next day, on November



VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson addresses crowd at Charleston Fisher House groundbreaking ceremony on November 18, 2016.

18, as we held the groundbreaking ceremony for our Charleston Fisher House, I looked out over the crowd and was truly humbled to realize yet again how privileged we are to serve these heroes and many others who joined us to celebrate our new opportunity to care for Veteran families. Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients Maj. Gen. James E. Livingston, USMC (ret.) and Corporal Kyle Carpenter, USMC (ret.) were there along with Clebe, Alex and a host of other Veterans who have sacrificed so much for our freedom. And as [VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson](#) spoke of our responsibility to earn what they and so many others have done, I believe our team recommitted themselves to providing nothing less than the very best for our patients and their families at both our VA and our new Fisher House, which will open in 2017.

#### **VA's SAIL Rating System**

Recently, USA TODAY featured a story on VA's Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning

(SAIL), which is a dashboard to assess performance in 28 areas. SAIL includes a 5-Star rating system for the 128 VAMCs in the United States that provide acute medical and/or surgical care to Veteran patients. Because we believe this is your VA, our practice over the past three years has been – and will continue to be – to share openly our performance results through all of our communication channels to assure our stakeholders of the high quality care provided for Veterans here. I am pleased to report that our VA continues to perform very well.

For the majority of quarters over the past two years, Charleston has been a 5-Star facility as assessed by SAIL. Further, we have shown substantial improvement in several areas over the past year giving our VA an overall 5-Star annual rating for the second year in a row according to the SAIL facility rating algorithm, which looks at total performance over the previous four quarters. We also

have a 3rd best efficiency ranking amongst all VA's, and we continue to be ranked in the top 10th percentile for HEDIS, an independent assessment of care quality amongst public and private sector medical centers. I am convinced these assessments demonstrate our team's commitment to providing the right care for our Veterans every time they need us, and assure our Veteran patients that they are receiving the best care anywhere. The bottom line is that our VA is always looking to improve even more the quality of the care and the care experience for every Veteran we are privileged to serve. We look forward to continuing to keep you informed of our progress.

The coming year promises to be full of new initiatives and innovations to improve the health and well-being of our community's Veterans. Our VA will open its long-anticipated Fisher House, our researchers will begin a promising study on stem cell treatment in cardiac patients, we will continue to improve access to care, and work with our community partners to provide the most comprehensive services possible. Our team is excited for the next steps towards being the very best VA – the very best medical center anywhere – to care for our Veterans, and we are proud to be part of the communities that love and cherish them. I thank you for your partnership with us and wish each of you happy holidays and a blessed 2018!

With deepest respect,

Scott R. Isaacks